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Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT L 00965 021130Z

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, UK, FR
SUBJECT: FRENCH REQUEST FOR REST CAMP IN MAURITIUS

REF: A) A-165, 7/10/73
B) PORT LOUIS 0826 8/23/73
C) A-200, 9/18/73

1. POST HAS REPORTED (REFS) VARIOUS DEVELOPMENTS WHICH MIGHT TEND ERODE U.K. POSITION IN MAURITUS ON SECURITY/DEFENSE ISSUES. LOCAL OFFICIAL BRITISH REACTION TO FRENCH OFFER TO GOM OF HELICOPTER, ASSIGNMENT OF INDIAN OFFICERS TO SPECIAL MOBILE FORCE, ETC., HAS BEEN ONE OF RESIGNATION, IF NOT PHLEGM. NEW DEVELOPMENT HAS HOWEVER NOW OCCURRED, ACCORDING TO U.K. HIGH COMMISSIONER CARTER, WHICH GIVES HIM CONSIDERABLE CONCERN.

2. CARTER SAID IN STRICT CONFIDENCE THAT FRENCH HAVE ASKED MAURITIANS IF A HINT FROM FRENCH ARMY FORCES IN REUNION MAY UTILIZE AREA NEAR MAHEBORG FOR REST CAMP ON ROTATIONAL BASIS. CARTER, EQUATING WORD UNIT WITH BRITISH BATTALION STRENGTH CONCLUDES THIS COULD MEAN 450 FRENCH TROOPS MIGHT BE ON THE ISLAND AT ANY GIVEN TIME.
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PAGE 02 PORT L 00965 021130Z

Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

3. LOCATION OF PROPOSED REST CAMP SIGNIFICANT IN THAT MAHEBOURG IS IN GRAND PORT AREA AND U.K. HICOMM FEARS THAT SUCH LOCATION MIGHT STIR UP WHOLE PORT DEVELOPMENT QUESTION THAT HE THOUGHT HAD BEEN QUASHED SEVERAL YEARS AGO. ALSO MAHEBOURG DIRECTLY ADJOINS PLAISANCE AIRFIELD (AND ITS U.S.- BUILT PARKING APRON - STATE 193625) WHICH IS EXPECTED TO BE PHASED OUT CIRCA 1976 WHEN CIVILIAN AIRCRAFT COMMENCE USE NEW AIRPORT IN NORTH TO BE CONSTRUCTED.

4. THIS REST CAMP REQUEST IS APPARENTLY ONE THAT WAS COOKED UP BETWEEN FONMIN DUVAL AND FRENCH SECRETARY OF STATE FOR COOPERATION DENIAU DURING LATTER'S RECENT VISIT TO MAURITIUS. UNCERTAIN AT THIS STAGE WHETHER QUAI D'ORSAY HAS GIVEN ITS ACCORD TO REQUEST OR WHETHER REQUEST IS EVEN ATTUNED TO OVERALL FRENCH VIEWS ON INDIAN OCEAN (PARIS 24597, 9/19/73).

5. REQUEST IS NOW IN HANDS OF PRIME MINISTER WHO PRIVATELY INFORMED CARTER OF IT. PRIMIN OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED BECAUSE OF TERRIFIC POLITICAL LEVERAGE PRESENCE OF FRENCH TROOPS COULD GIVE DUVAL. HE EQUALLY OBVIOUSLY AWARE OF IMPACT SUCH STEP WOULD HAVE WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY AND VIS-A-VIS OAU PARTNERS, INDIA, ETC. CONSEQUENTLY, HE APPARENTLY HOPING U.K. CAN COME UP WITH SOME RATIONALE TO ALLOW HIM REJECT REQUEST. CARTER SAYS THAT ACCORDING HIS OWN INTER-PRETATION U.K./GOM DEFENSE ARRANGEMENTS, ITS PROVISIONS WOULD NOT RPT NOT PRECLUDE SUCH REST CAMP. HOWEVER, HE HAS BEEN IN CONTACT WITH LONDON AUTHORITIES WHO HAVE PRESUMABLY DISCUSSED ISSUE WITH DR. RAM DURING HIS PRESENT SHORT STAY IN U.K.

6. UNLIKELY THIS MATTER WILL AT ALL SURFACE DURING PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO NEW YORK SINCE BRITISH PREFER FOR MOMENT TO KEEP IT ON BILATERAL BASIS. NEVERTHELESS, THOUGHT THIS REPORT WOULD BE OF USEFUL BACKGROUND TO DEPARTMENT AT THIS TIME.
SULLIVAN

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